Agate and Pyrite

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Agate and Pyrite

by LadyFelixTristis

Summary

Many people have a terrible habit of walking all over Will Graham.

When a very different Will Graham from another dimension is unexpectedly dropped off in Wolf Trap with no way to return to his original universe, he takes it upon himself to make everyone back the hell off.

Mostly, though? He likes to have fun, and his new twin-brother-otherself is going to have fun too, whether he likes it or not.

Geologist Will comes from *(Extremely) Unconventional Therapy*, but no knowledge of that story is required!

Notes

This first chapter is the relevant sections of EUT rewritten from Geologist!Will's perspective and fleshed out a bit. Everything after this will be new. <3

Nice to Meet You

"Is this an *underground tunnel?*" a man asked, incredulously. The dude looked like…well, *him.* If he was decades older.

"Oh good," he said from his position propped against a rough stone wall, blasted by dynamite a very long time ago. "I've reached the hallucination stage of dehydration already. That was quick." He looked at his watch. He hadn't been trapped *that* long, had he? Granted, he had been drifting in and out of sleep, so who really knew. But no, his watch confirmed that it hadn't really been long enough for him to have hallucinations from dehydration. Maybe he was breathing bad air.

"What are you doing in a *tunnel*, and wearing *that*?" the hallucination asked. What a judgmental prick.

Will was wearing a hard hat and climbing harness, for obvious reasons. He wasn't even thirty years old. He had no interest in getting bashed on the head by a rock or stuck down a shaft because the manway suffered a catastrophic failure or he'd broken a leg and couldn't climb the ladders. Then again, the guy had said *tunnel.* Shouldn't his hallucination have known they were in a mine drift? Maybe not.

He rolled his eyes anyway. "It's a *mine.* I'm a geologist. I'm taking ore samples. Was taking samples. Now I'm waiting to die." Or be rescued, which was unfortunately extremely unlikely. His roommate wouldn't even miss him until late that night.

"A bird!" a little girl exclaimed, bringing his attention to the presence of *kids*. She was pointing at a bat disturbed from its rest.

"Kids don't belong in mines," he said, confused and unhappy.

"Why are you waiting to die?" the old guy asked him.

Will vaguely gestured up the drift with his head. "Old timbers broke, gobbing gave way. This drift is a dead-end, no stope or winze connecting to another level. Trapped, just me and that bat."

"Oh my goodness!" the girl said, clearly excited. "Shiny!" She pointed at the wall, where tiny crystals glittered in the light from his emergency lantern.

"Calcite," Will offered. He liked them too.

"You're not trying to escape?" a boy asked him. He removed his backpack and extracted a water bottle, pouring some sort of powder into it. He shook it before offering it to Will.

A solid, real bottle made contact with his fingers.

“Whoaaaa,” Will said, startled. “The kids were only fine when this was a hallucination. What are you people doing here? You can’t be here.” He did open the bottle and sip from it, though, the liquid very welcome.

“I was trying to escape,” he said after he drank some water. “It’s too much rock to move before my body gives out. On the very off-chance someone does come to rescue me, I’ll last longer if I don’t expend energy.” It was *a lot* of rock. If any rescuers did show up, it would take them a long time to get to him, and he was better off not moving.

“Is it too much rock to move before both our bodies give out?” the other dude asked.

Will looked at him, unimpressed. What, this old dude was going to move literal tons of rock? “Yes, it is.”

“Guess that means you aren’t a werewolf?”

“Werewolves don’t exist,” Will said with a *look*. What kind of question was that?

The man seemed to accept his denial of the existence of werewolves easily enough. “Shame. You’d probably have more endurance. No rescue?”

Will rolled his eyes again. “This mine has been abandoned for seventy years. My safety flag is outside, but that’s a two hour drive and another one hour walk from civilization. I work freelance. It’ll be a while before anybody notices I haven’t returned from this trip. Seriously, how are you here?” It was, quite literally, impossible. He had gone all the way to the face of the drift before turning back to begin taking samples. There was nowhere anybody could have hidden.

“Okay, kids, you know the drill,” the other dude said as he thrust one arm at Will’s face. What, exactly, was he meant to do with the guy’s arm? “Touch the watch, Will,” the guy said. What the hell? Maybe it was a hallucination after all.

“That’s okay, I have my own watch,” Will said.

“You should touch his watch,” the boy said. “We’ll escape you.”

“Ex-scape!” the little girl yelled, giggling. She was moving her head back and forth as she stared at the crystals. Will understood. Crystals were beautiful and the sparkle could be mesmerizing. He used to do that when he was a kid, too.

“Isha,” the boy said to the girl. “Time to go.”

“I like it here,” she said, shaking her head.

“Maybe you can work in tunnels when you grow up,” the old dude offered.

“No,” Will said. “Working in tunnels is a bad life choice.” Still, he loved being a geologist. If he could re-do his life, he would still be climbing around in mines and caves. He *would* avoid this particular mine, though.

Will tilted his head and heard the sound of rockfall. Quite possibly the beginning of additional collapses. “Ab, Mischa, Will, gather round. Time to go,” the guy said a little more urgently, perhaps hearing the same thing. Maybe he would be better off playing along with whatever insanity this guy offered. The kids seemed pretty certain about it, for whatever reason. Worst case scenario, nothing would happen.

“Yeah, okay, I’ll embrace the insanity,” Will said. “The watch?” he reached out and laid a finger on it. The boy and girl touched the watch as well.

“Good? Good,” the other dude said.

He pressed a red button on the side of the watch, and Will felt *weird*.

—

Will collapsed backward onto a wooden floor, the stone wall no longer holding his weight. “Oooops,” he said with a bit of chagrin as he propped himself up on his elbows. He vaguely registered the kid collecting his water bottle from the floor.

“How in the hell?” he asked, trying to process what was happening. *Is this some kind of fever dream?* Will wondered. *Two other guys who look just like me?*

Another guy who looked like an older version of himself - not quite as old as the other one, though - was propped up against the headboard of his bed. A book lay forgotten in his lap as he stared at them with what seemed to be confusion and consternation.

“Took the words out of my mouth,” the guy on the bed said. “Who are you, how did you get in, and *why* are you here?”

The one with the magic watch seemed tired, like he’d had the longest ever day and needed it to be over several hours ago. “Who is the Chesapeake Ripper?” he asked.

“Wish I knew,” the guy on the bed replied. “Haven’t solved that one yet.”

Magic watch guy tossed a balled-up paper to the other guy. “There’s the information you need. And here, look, you can have a twin. Or…brother, anyway. You’re probably not the same age. He’s a bit dehydrated. He’s you, as a geologist. Isn’t that fun? Have a nice life!” And without another word, he pressed the kids’ hands against the watch and clicked the button again, disappearing, leaving Will stranded with the confused man on the bed. The man’s book had been tossed to the side as he caught the paper.

“So…” Will said, looking over at a…twin? Brother? That’s what magic watch guy had said. “Um. Hi?”

“What just happened?” the other guy mumbled to himself as he un-balled the crinkled paper, trying to smooth it out on his thigh.

“I don’t understand it myself,” Will admitted. This was some sci-fi shit. Which he didn’t mind, necessarily. He loved sci-fi as much as any other geek in their twenties. He just hadn’t believed any of it was *real*. Though if the guy had come from the future…well. That was

kind of exciting, to think he might see stuff like time travel or universe jumping or whatever was going on, in his lifetime.

“What in hell?” the other guy asked, still studying the paper smoothed out on his lap. “Look, I’ve been having some problems lately determining what is real.” That sounded concerning. “Could you read this and tell me what it says? Not that it’ll help if you’re a hallucination,” he muttered in defeat.

“Um, that’d be fine,” Will said. “But do you think I could get some water? I’m still pretty dehydrated, and I’m a bit too weak to walk right now.” Not without getting a bit dizzy, probably, though he was sure he could get moving if he absolutely had to. His mouth was sticky, though, and the lack of fluids made him nauseous.

The other guy’s eyes went wide in concern, which was really sweet from someone who wasn’t sure Will was even real. Sliding the book out of his way and laying the sheet of paper aside, he slid off of the bed and gingerly approached Will, slowly reaching a hand out to his forehead and hair. “Feels real…” he murmured. “Just a moment.” Will watched the other man walk away, hopefully towards a kitchen or bathroom where a glass of water could be acquired.

If he was honest, the other guy was pretty hot. Really nice arse. Could be better if his trousers weren’t the frumpy style old men wore. Still, Will crossed his fingers that he’d look like that in his, what? Thirties? Early forties? He looked a bit ill, though. Way worse than magic watch guy, who mostly looked exhausted. This one looked kind of feverish.

He heard water running, then the other guy appeared with a glass of water and a bottle of sports drink. “Bless you,” Will said in gratitude. The water was just-out-of-the-tap cool, which was perfect. Easier to drink when he wasn’t feeling well than ice water would be. The sports drink would help with the electrolytes.

“Are you…religious?” the other guy asked, seeming slightly weirded out.

What? Religious? Will wondered. *Oh right, I said ‘bless you’ like an old lady in a big hat.* He’d picked up all kinds of habits from the wide variety of people he’d met traveling the country over the years.

He coughed a little bit. “Just an expression. Haven’t been to church since Mrs. Harmon dragged me there as a kid.” A really little kid, back before papa’s accident on the boat.

The other guy tilted his head. “Every Sunday and Wednesday?”

“Yes, exactly.” He cracked the seal of the sports drink and drank a few gulps of it, then washed them down with water. He loved water. Water was life. He didn’t even mind wading through several feet of it exploring wet caves and mines up north. He would have been much better off getting stuck in a wet cave, if he was honest. Might have had a chance to last until help arrived.

The other guy returned to the bed and sat down on the edge. He picked up the piece of paper again and stared at it, intently. “Would you mind?” he asked, standing again to offer the

paper, outstretched. As soon as Will accepted it, the other guy sat back down on the bed.

Will figured it was the least he could do, considering he'd been dropped in this guy's house with no warning. He was being extraordinarily chill about the situation, actually. He wondered how often weird stuff happened to the dude. Then again, he himself had just been pulled out of a deathtrap and plopped into a nice little house with water, and was pretty chill too.

If, as he strongly suspected, the older guy was *also* Will Graham, maybe Will Grahams were just good at dealing with weirdness.

Feeling a little better, Will scooted across the floor until his back was to an armchair he could lean against. The gear he wore clinked as he did so, bringing back memories more fond than those of his most recent exploration. He picked up the paper, and read:

"A faithful narrative of my dealings with Dr. Hannibal Lecter." He cleared his throat. "Is this from Pride and Prejudice? Don't recognize his name, though."

"Please continue," the other guy requested, clearly tense.

"Hannibal Lecter is the serial killer known as the Chesapeake Ripper in every universe I have visited in which I have had the occasion to make his acquaintance, which is the majority. I first met Dr. Lecter in the office of Crawford, SAC BAU, when I was asked to consult on a case concerning eight missing girls in the Minnesota area. Shortly thereafter, Lecter traveled to Minnesota and murdered Cassie Boyle, the first victim of what I would come to call the Copycat killer. […]"

It was all rather fascinating, he thought. Almost like the plot of a TV show. It went into great detail about the estimated timeline of events and claimed that Will had come down with auto-immune encephalitis around the time of, or shortly after, the murders of Cassie Boyle and Marissa Schurr.

"Those names mean anything to you?" Will asked the other guy.

He could see his throat move in a dramatic *gulp*ing motion. "Yeah," he rasped.

"And you mentioned hallucinations. That's probably a symptom of brain inflammation," Will pointed out, helpfully. This was not good. Encephalitis was serious business. He'd known a lady who was a brilliant pianist and very bright until she nearly died from encephalitis and was left a shadow of herself, spending every waking hour in front of the television and only partly comprehending what she was watching.

"Please, just keep reading," the other guy requested.

"Sure thing, buddy." He was determined to keep it cool. Panicking would not help. He continued the narrative, which ended with the writer, presumably magic watch guy, murdering tons of versions of his ex-boyfriend or husband or something, the first of whom had cheated on him and tried to get his piece on the side to finish magic watch guy off.

Which was, um. It all seemed kind of extreme to him, but he guessed that kind of shit might be normal if you'd been living as a serial killer for several years?

"Wow," Will said. "So, the guy who wrote this, with the magic watch. He was us if we were old, right?"

The other guy cleared his throat. "Seems like it," he agreed.

"Well, we'd better keep this shit private. Don't want anyone to know we're capable of becoming serial killers, eh?" he laughed nervously. Yeah, okay, he'd had *thoughts*. *Everybody* did from time to time. And the weird trance he had gone into that one time he saw a body… well. He was pretty sure that wasn't normal, but whatever. It seemed like actually killing people would be a lot of work. It was so easy to just *not* kill anybody.

The other guy snorted. "They already know. *I* didn't know. Didn't want to know."

"Dude, chill out," Will said. "You aren't a serial killer yet, right? And neither am I. As long as we keep that going, we're fine. It's not like we're psychopaths or some shit. We'd have to *choose* to be serial killers. So we won't. What's up with this Lecter guy, though? I mean, if anyone deserves to be killed…" he hinted, wondering if the other guy would actually take the bait. He didn't actually want to kill anybody, but he wanted to see what the other guy would do.

The other guy stared at him, unamused. "You're baiting me," he said.

"Guilty," Will said with a chuckle. "Listen, murdering people seems like a lot of work. I'm not lazy, you know? I climb around on cliffs and inside mines, and that's not exactly easy. Would have been fatal if this homicidal magic watch guy hadn't shown up and dropped me off here. Anyway, what I'm saying is, let's get you to a hospital and let the cops deal with the serial killer, yeah?"

The other guy, who was hugging himself as if holding himself together, just sighed. "I'll have to be involved," he said glumly. "Jack's going to want evidence and he'll say I'm best placed to get it."

"Oh, fuck no," Will said. "Tell whoever Jack is to fuck off and get the evidence himself. Besides, all he has to do is have dinner with the guy and pocket a chunk of meat, it sounds like. That doesn't sound too fucking difficult."

"You say fuck a lot," the other guy observed.

"Only when I'm fucking pissed off. Not at you, bro. At the assholes around you. Look. Get your shoes on. Where's your wallet and your keys? I can use your license to drive us to the hospital, since we're the same fucking person. Do you have a fake ID or something I could use later? We probably can't both be Will Graham forever."

The other guy sighed. "This is so weird," he said dejectedly. "How is any of this even real."

“Dunno,” Will admitted. “But this is way more interesting than being dead, probably, so I’m here for it.” He climbed to his feet with some effort and removed his helmet, tossing it onto the chair he’d been leaning against.

“Jesus, you’re still…just change out of whatever you’re wearing, at least. If you’re going to be my knight in shining armor, there are better things you could be wearing than a climbing harness.”

Will nodded seriously. “Fashion is absolutely our number one concern right now.”

The other guy sighed again. “Fuck off,” he said, but he was smiling.

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From his position at the other guy’s bedside, Will heard a nurse telling someone that *Will Graham is not accepting additional visitors at this time,* and a deep male voice responding with a *Yes he is.*

What an asshole.

Will slipped out the door and closed it behind him. He was feeling sleepy from the inactivity involved in guarding the other guy’s bedside, but assholes always gave him enough of a rush to be obnoxious.

“He’s really not,” Will insisted. “He’s not well enough for visitors. I’m the only one authorized, and I’m afraid I have to ask you to leave.”

“Who do you think you are?” the big man said, clearly irritated. Just as clearly writing him off as a non-threat.

He hated it when people refused to take him seriously because he had a baby face and was maybe kind of short. He could understand why his other self was scruffy. He probably had to be like that, if he associated with people like this guy. “His brother,” he responded. “Who do you think *you* are?”

“Will doesn’t have a brother,” the big man said with certainty.

“Correction. Will *didn’t know* he had a brother until very recently.” He couldn’t help rolling his eyes. What business was it of this guy’s, anyway?

“How could he *not know he had a brother?*” the big man asked, clearly incredulous. Will could tell that one of this man’s weaknesses was a lack of imagination.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Will asked, mocking bleeding into his tone. He tried to dial it back. “When mom left him with dad, she didn’t know she was pregnant.”

That gave the big man pause, but he was not giving up quite yet. “Fine, but I need to see him.”

“For what?” he asked, pissed off. Surely nothing was so important he needed to interrupt crucial recovery time for a very serious illness. He would claw this guy’s eyes out and knee him in the balls if he didn’t get the message soon, just like his mom had taught him.

“We have a case and we need him.” The big man’s voice was stubborn.

“Oh *hell* no,” he said, his fingers curling into claw shapes and his knee twitching. But, he considered, he should probably do things properly before he resorted to violence. “Security! Escort this man away from this room, please! Nurse! Add whoever this guy is to the banned visitors list! Please and thank you, you’re the best!” he smiled charmingly at the nurses, fluttering his eyelashes a little. They smiled back. Sometimes being *exceptionally pretty for a boy* was useful.

The big man complained loudly as he was escorted away by hospital security, backwards. Will gave him a little finger-wave and a cheeky grin.

Score 1 for the Grahams.

He gently opened the door and slid through it, closing it with a soft *click* behind him. He stepped lightly as he approached the bed, until he noticed that the other guy was awake.

He didn’t bother to ease into the visitor chair at that point, plopping down and letting it squeak. “You heard that, then?” Will asked his kind-of twin.

The other guy cleared his throat. “Uh, yeah, thanks for scaring him away. Not really in the mood for corpses.” He looked at Will, eyes already sharper than they had been when first arriving at the hospital. He was recovering nicely, it seemed. Will was relieved. “The math doesn’t add up, you know. Mom left when I was really small. You’re at least 5 years younger than me.”

Will rolled his eyes. “He doesn’t need to know that. And I’m pretty sure it’s closer to ten.” If the other guy couldn’t tell how young he was, he wondered how young the other still looked when clean-shaven. Maybe he would have to resort to facial hair someday, too. It would suck to not be taken seriously when he was, like, middle-aged or whatever.

“Did you grow up with dad?” the other guy asked.

“Nope,” he said, popping the ‘p’ in the word. He wondered if that would have been better or worse than growing up with mom. “I could tell you did because of all the fishing stuff at your house. Dad died before I knew him, but mom told me about the fishing. Plus you’re a fed, and there’s no way that would have happened if mom was around.”

The other guy’s face made Will feel sad, the mix of longing and resentment. “You…you grew up with mom.”

“No choice,” he admitted. “She was gonna leave me with dad but then he died in a boating accident, so she had to take me along.” He forced his voice to be emotionless as possible. He barely remembered papa so his grief for that man was for the idea of having a father rather

than the reality of the man. And he had always been a little resentful that his mom had *meant* to abandon him but was forced to raise him by circumstance.

“Was it nice, growing up with her?”

“It was interesting,” he admitted. That was one thing he could say about it. Very interesting. “Mom was a real free love hippie type, so we drove around in her bus. Settled down for a few years so I could go to high school, but we lived in a partially-converted barn. It had a lot of shag carpet but no plumbing, except a spigot outside, and electricity was from a generator that was usually out of fuel.” See? Interesting. Not always fun, though.

“Huh. Is she…was she still alive when you left?” Will could tell the other guy was trying not to laugh, but as far as he was concerned, laughter was a perfectly acceptable response to what he had said.

“Yeah, she was around. Mostly sending post cards from her travels. Nepal and India lately. She’ll be sad when they tell her I got crushed in a mine, but it can’t be helped. Hazard of the job and all that.” The thing about his mom was that he didn’t always like her, but he did always love her. And she loved him in turn. “Wish I could tell her where I really am,” he said with a sad smile. “She’d totally dig this multidimensional travel thing, plus in this world she might not be banned from Nevada.”

There was a beat of silence.

“…banned from? Nevada? What, the entire state? I don’t think that’s a thing here.”

“Really? Well, it was a thing where I’m from. And it’s a long story,” he said, grinning like a madman.

“I’ve got time,” the other guy pointed out, gesturing at his hospital-gowned form and the surrounding machinery. Even as he said so, he eyed Will with trepidation.

“Well, this one time…”

Aliens, Psychics & Ghosts (oh my!)

Chapter Summary

Our boys have an interesting conversation during Will's recovery in the hospital.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So, I said that mom was a bit of a hippie, right?" he grinned, seemingly in anticipation of sharing his story.

"Right," Will said.

"She was also seriously swayed by conspiracy theories. Totally convinced that the government was in the process of implanting chips in everybody, part of the New World Order, constantly dosing us with chemicals--"

"That one's kind of true," Will mumbled.

He rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I know, and that didn't help. Anyway, her favorite conspiracy theories involved aliens. Well, bigfoot too. But especially aliens."

"Ah."

"Yeah, so we did a lot of traveling in the forests in the northwest, and in the deserts around the secret military base, in Nevada, you know?" He massaged his right hand with his left. Will wondered if it was injured or sore.

"It's been declassified," Will shared. "Area 51. That sounds…interesting. Your hand okay?"

He shook his head in a dismissive gesture. "Fine, just got a bit banged up in the collapse. But yeah, among other things, we were searching for caves that supposedly led to hidden tunnels into Area 51. That's how I got interested in geology. Some of those caves were amazing."

"I did wonder." Will supposed it was as good a field as any other, but he'd never personally found geology particularly intriguing. Granted, he *had* spent a considerable amount of time studying insects, so who was he to judge?

"Right, well, we found a secret tunnel," he said flatly.

"No," Will denied.

“Yes. We were traveling through this fantastically interesting cave, had to really squeeze into it. Obviously carved out by water ages ago when there was actual water in that area. Little fossils of ammonite and trilobite in the walls. Absolutely gorgeous. Gave me chills. I mean, it was kind of chilly in there anyway. But it was fucking beautiful.”

“Sounds amazing,” Will admitted. He had an ammonite fossil at home, and some trilobites of course. What zoology nerd didn’t have a few trilobites sitting around collecting dust? Maybe he’d show them to his new guest once he was released from the hospital.

“So we’re going along, quite a ways in, and we find a staircase.”

“…that seems out of place.”

“It was made of stone, blended in somewhat, but it was obviously manmade, you know? *But* mom thought that it really wasn’t beyond the possibility of a caver building a staircase in their favorite cave or something. Who knows. So we go down the stairs, curious, thinking maybe we’ll find the caver who built the staircase camping out down there. We continue on a while longer, turn a corner, and *bam!* A fucking *spiral* staircase. One hundred percent manmade, expertly welded high-quality metal. A caver did *not* build that. It’s beautiful and creepy as fuck and completely out of place.”

“I don’t like this.” Will was getting chills. The kind of chills you get when you’re listening to a scary story around the campfire as a kid and it suddenly feels like there’s something in the darkness just behind you. Something that’s reaching out.

Possibly it was the remnants of his fever, but he would blame his imagination for the moment.

“My heart’s pounding so hard and mom is shaking in excitement,” he continued. “We climb up the staircase. I mean, what else are we going to do? We finally found something weird in a cave. This could be it. Someone had set grating on the ground where the rocks naturally had gaps to make a smooth walkway. I’m a kid, but I know it’s totally weird. Eventually it opens into this big room, and it looks like people have been camping out in there.” He chewed on his lip for a moment.

“Okay,” Will said, not without some trepidation.

“So that’s weird, all of these, like, military-grade supplies and whatever. Kind of like…are you familiar with how the government hid survival supplies in mines during the cold war so people could live down there for a while in case of, uh, being nuked?”

“Vaguely,” Will agreed.

“Yeah, so it’s kind of like that, stacks of barrels and boxes and some sleeping cots. And then we go through another gap in a wall, and *there it is.*”

“A secret tunnel?” Will wondered.

“An elevator just standing in this big open space. A fucking *elevator,* shiny and new looking, just sitting there with the buttons glowing.”

Will felt a little bit breathless. “That’s…but *why?*”

“Right? So we poke around, try to find some other access point that wouldn’t be as conspicuous as an elevator, you know. Like some stairs. There was a solid metal door in one of the walls, but we had no way to get into it. No keyhole, no handle, nothing. I was pretty good at lock picking even at that age, but that skill’s pointless without a keyhole.”

Will decided to ignore the lock picking comment. “So you went in the elevator?”

“We go in the elevator,” he confirms. “It takes us to another level, and the ride is smooth. Just a *shhhhh* and tiny vibration, as if it’s being maintained as well as a million dollar car. I’d never experienced something that smooth in my life, riding around in mom’s little bus all the time. So the doors open, and mom is practically laughing she’s so thrilled. The doors open to a tunnel, this one blasted out by people, like a mine, right? Not a natural cave.”

“Okay.” Will felt more and more tense the longer the story continued. Would he have survived being raised by his mom? Obviously, he would have. The proof was right in front of him. Would he have become a geologist instead of law enforcement? Apparently, he quite likely would have.

“And then we’re walking down a tunnel. There are others branching off, but we keep going straight. Before too long though, there are goddamn *cameras* mounted in the tunnel and I think we both know that’s the beginning of the end of it, but mom is still determined to get as far as possible. Still, we backtrack and take one of the side tunnels where there don’t seem to be cameras.” His entire form is tense in remembered anxiety. “We don’t get all that far before some military security guys with big guns surround us front and back.” He exhaled. “It was scary as hell.”

Will cleared his throat uncomfortably. “You seem to have survived, at least.”

“Mom flipped out when they explained they needed her to sign something agreeing to keep quiet. They seriously informed her that they were authorized to use lethal force but didn’t want to because I was there.”

“How old were you?”

“Like eight maybe. Ten? Something like that. So she’s flipping out, yelling, going on about being a citizen and having a right to know, and finally they just tranquilize her.” He grimaced.

Will just stared.

“They *escorted* us out, carrying mom the whole way on a stretcher, and put us in our bus. Laid her down in the back and told me she wouldn’t remember and that I shouldn’t tell her anything because it would be *bad for her health*.” He took a big breath and let it out slowly before continuing. “A tow truck was waiting for us, pulled us up onto a big truck bed and

carried us out of Nevada. Considering what had just happened, I was pretty chill about the journey out. I liked being up so high with the bus on the truck."

"Then what happened? Did you tell anyone?"

"Well, mom woke up and didn't remember what had happened and no way was I going to tell her, because I didn't want her to get shot. Those guys had to have known that no one would believe some 8 year old kid about secret tunnels in the desert, and they definitely scared me into not telling the only person who *would* believe me."

"What happened?"

"She pointed us towards Nevada again. When we got to the border, the checkpoint informed us that mom was banned and we needed to turn around. They didn't even check her ID. They just looked at her and knew. I guess they probably had the license plate on file by then." He shrugged. "Mom was incredibly confused and very suspicious, what with the missing time, but I didn't tell her anything."

"Oh…kay. What do you mean a checkpoint?"

"What, is that not a thing here? State border checkpoints? Stop people from smuggling in illegal stuff, that kind of thing."

"No, neither are state bans."

"Huh, that's interesting. Which state are we in right now? Virginia?"

"Yeah," Will agreed.

"I wonder if that tunnel is in this dimension too. I bet I could find it, but Nevada is a ways out."

"No." Will disagreed. "You are not going to get killed checking out a place you've already seen anyway, especially when you know there's a chance it's guarded by people willing to kill you for being there."

"Might not be guards here," he said, a speculative look on his face.

"No." Was this his life now? Trying to stop his kind-of brother from getting himself killed on crazy adventures?

"Anyway, it was kind of a pain," he dismissed. "We had to drive around the exterior of the Nevada border all the time. Once I grew up, though, I could go by myself. Some great old mines in Nevada."

"If you say so."

"I do," he nodded enthusiastically. "I'll show you some mines and caves sometime, there are *tons* in this area, maybe when you're feeling better and won't pass out on a hike."

“Didn’t you almost die in a mine? Like, yesterday?”

“Yeah, but it’s not like every mine collapses. That was my first and hopefully my last.”

“Apparently it *would have* been your last,” Will observed.

He grimaced. “Yeah. I got lucky that magic watch guy was passing through my universe, I guess. But what do you think? Up for a hike when you’re back to normal?”

Will shrugged. “I usually take my walks above-ground so my dogs can come.”

“You could bring a dog. I mean, most people wouldn’t, and I wouldn’t really recommend it. Yours are really good dogs, though,” he said with a smile. “I bet at least one of them would enjoy it, and as long as we weren’t exploring someplace with toxic minerals or large bat populations it’d probably be fine.” He stared at the wall in thought. “We should probably get some of those dog hiking shoes. And I wonder if they make head lamps for dogs. That would be adorable.”

“...that would be adorable. You talk. A lot.” Will doubted he had spoken that much in one go in his entire life, and he certainly had never spoken with the same degree of enthusiasm.

“Why wouldn’t I? I have interesting stuff to say,” he pointed out. Will would admit that it was true.

“It’s not bad, just not what I’m used to.” Jimmy was probably the most talkative person he knew. He would avoid introducing the two of them.

“Oh please. I’m sure you talk a lot when it’s about corpses or whatever.” He made a face.

“...I guess that’s kind of true. Except when I let everybody else talk, only to throw in a cryptic comment once in a while. Keeps things interesting.”

“You do? Like what?” he looked very intrigued.

“Like….oh, I don’t know. My brain is still broken. If you stick around, it’ll happen eventually.” He would be glad when his mind was no longer dulled by inflammation and pain medication.

“What do you mean *if* I stick around? Where else would I go?” Will could tell that his guest understood it was a throwaway comment, but guessed that he was testing the waters to see how Will felt about a more-or-less permanent house guest.

“You’ll stay with me as long as you want,” Will said, making eye contact with the younger man. “I don’t know how to get you papers,” he admitted, “But we’ll have to figure something out. You can’t use my identity for long, for obvious reasons.”

“Yeah, exactly.” He nodded. “I might be screwed. It probably takes a lot of money to get really good papers.”

“You could just kill me and take over my life,” Will suggested.

“Um, dude. Are you suicidal? Maybe you should talk to a therapist or something.” He was grinning though. He knew Will was joking.

Will laughed. “My therapist might be a cannibalistic serial killer.”

“You’ll need a new one, then. He’s obviously nuts, and it’s probably not great to have someone with personal problems that extreme in your head.”

Will snorted. “*Personal problems* is one way to describe being a cannibalistic serial killer, I guess.” He took a deep breath. “Hey, what is your name going to be? We’ve established that you probably aren’t going to kill me and take over my life, so you can’t be Will Graham.”

“Huh,” the other said. “Bill?”

“That was dad,” Will said.

“Oh.” He looked surprised. “Okay. Uh, how about Ted?”

”Ted?”

“What? It’s a perfectly respectable name. No? Okay, fine. I’ll call myself Seitan.” He leaned back, as if it was settled.

Will barked a laugh. “Satan? You’re not serious.”

“No, Seitan, like the food. But you’re right. I’m not serious. Onyx?” he grinned, mischievous.

“I couldn’t take you seriously,” he said, shaking his head.

“Neither could I,” he agreed. “Then I’ll be…hmm. Oh, I know. Galen. Galen Graham.” He looked almost smug.

“That’s...okay. I guess. Why though?” It was actually kind of nice.

Galen shrugged. “Galena is an ore I search for a lot when I’m surveying old mines. A lot of lead, some silver. Generally a good sign that someone who files a claim on the mine might get something worth mining.”

“Right. Okay.” People had names like Jasper and Sapphire, so why not an ore of lead and silver, he guessed.

“I’m a geologist,” Galen said with another little shrug.

“Aren’t there different kinds of geologists?” Will wondered. “Do you have a specialty?”

Galen smirked. “Mineral exploration. Lots of wandering through wilderness to find promising-looking rocks to examine and take samples of. But underground is my favorite. I love exploring caves and old mines. It feels so magical, you know? Like I’m entering a completely different world.”

“Sounds nice,” Will said, a little sleepily. “How are the dogs?” he asked. The treatment really took a lot out of him, and Galen’s story had made him tense, which exhausted him more.

“It’s all good,” Galen said. “I’m similar enough to you that they seem unconcerned by my presence. They’re good dogs.”

“Yeah, they are. I miss them.”

“You’ll be able to go home in a few days, continue the treatment outpatient. Not sure if you *should*, though. Did I tell you Jack stopped by?” He seemed almost amused.

Will felt his stomach sink with dread. “What did he want?”

“He wanted to interrogate me,” Galen shrugged. “Said he’d been checking records, and I don’t exist. That I must be some kind of impostor.” He was definitely amused.

“And? What did you say?” This could be an actual problem. Maybe it wasn’t good that Galen had stuck up for him when Jack had come by with his corpse photos. Maybe they would be better off with Jack on Galen’s side.

“I asked him if he was having trouble with his vision. I mean, fuck’s sake dude, even if I was born and raised in an anti-government cult and don’t have legal ID, you and I look fucking identical apart from the facial hair and age difference.”

Will couldn’t help chuckling at that. “Did you...did you really tell Jack Crawford that you were born and raised in an anti-government cult?”

“No, I said ‘*even if I was* born and raised in an anti-government cult,’ so I wasn’t lying.” Galen’s expression was innocent. Will recognized it from practicing facial expressions in the mirror.

“I hope he doesn’t take it farther than that,” Will said. He could make things difficult, and Will wouldn’t have a choice: he would have to report Jack to HR for harassment.

“Same. Hopefully mom is in the wind in this universe too. Impossible to contact. I can see that asshole trying to contact her to interrogate her about her *two* sons.”

“It’s entirely possible she does have two sons,” Will pointed out. That was a weird thought. Strange enough having two versions of the same son, but what if an *actual* younger brother turned up on his doorstep someday?

“True,” Galen said, unaware of Will’s thoughts. “She’ll refuse to answer anyway if he says he’s from the FBI. She doesn’t talk to cops. Ever. About anything. At least, my version didn’t.”

Will sighed. “We’ll figure it out. Maybe I should repair the fence at the end of my driveway and start locking it while I’m home.”

“You don’t think he would park by the road and walk?” Galen asked with some humor.

“Maybe I’ll report him to HR for harassment.” He might have to anyway.

“That’s more like it,” Galen grinned.

“He’s not a bad guy,” Will argued. “Just focused on catching criminals and saving lives.”

“Sorry man, I don’t buy into the ‘sacrifice one to save many’ approach when the One is someone I like. Random stranger? Yeah, whatever. You or me? Nope. Sacrifice the rest of them.”

Will threw back his head and laughed. “I...I mean, I get what you’re saying,” his smile turned sober, “but it’s too easy to empathize with victims of these people.”

“Is that what you do? Empathize with victims?” Galen’s head tilted with curiosity.

Will was silent for a moment. “No,” he said, “I empathize with their killers.”

“Why not the victims?” Galen’s voice was non-judgmental.

“It hurts too much. It’s terrifying. Doing that, I come back to myself running into things or curled into a little ball.”

Galen frowned at that. “What’s it like for you to *empathize* with the killers?”

“It’s oily. It makes me feel tainted. I...the way it works, I experience it as they do, all of their anger and satisfaction. I come back to myself with the sense that the victim deserved it. I hate it.” He paused, flexing his hands where they rested in his lap. “No, that’s a lie. I love it, and that’s a problem.” It made him afraid of himself and who he might truly be.

“I’ve only seen one crime scene,” Galen admitted. “I…uh…*empathized* with the killer too. Do you think that means anything, that we, I don’t know, instinctively lean that direction?”

“I don’t know.” Will felt deeply unhappy. “Probably.”

Galen’s expression was sympathetic. They both knew the implications hung heavier on Will, due to sheer quantity of experience if nothing else. “I don’t think it does,” Galen said. I mean, we don’t want to die, right? Why would we want to put ourselves in the place of the terrified person about to die. At least the killer usually lives, even if that experience does come with uncomfortably positive feelings.”

Will wanted to scoff at that, but he couldn’t truly argue with that logic. “I thought I wanted to work in the field,” he said instead. “It’s all I wanted to do. Now that I’m there, I feel like I’m being crushed.”

“Do you think it’ll be any better now that your encephalitis has been treated? It has to be better, right?”

“I don’t see how it could be worse. I just hope it’s better *enough* that I won’t feel like I’m losing my sense of self.” If he lost what was most important to him, like his love for his dogs, or the joy he took in fishing, who would he even be anymore?

“This empathy thing,” Galen said, eyebrows scrunching.

“Yeah?” Will wondered what experiences Galen might be able to share, and if they were much different from his own.

“I kinda always just thought I was psychic,” he admitted. “I mean, what other explanation was there?” He leaned back, looking at the ceiling. “I saw what happened. In my mind. And it happened other times too, but not with crimes. Just with...stuff.” He returned his gaze to Will, meeting his eyes. “Mom said I was probably reading the psychic imprint of a place, or something.”

Will chuckled. “You’re so lucky no one brought you to the attention of mental health professionals with questionable ethics.”

“Uh, yeah, I can agree with that. I guess it helped that I didn’t tell any of the mental health professionals I *did* spend time with what was happening since nobody believes in psychics anyway and I didn’t want them to think I was crazy.”

“...do you still think you're psychic?” He could understand why that might be, especially being raised by their evidently eccentric mother.

“I mean, come on dude, what else is there? Like yeah, you can tell certain things happened because it’s logical or there are signs, *that’s* just like tracking wildlife in the bush.” He spread his fingers over both of his knees, expression serious. “But to be entirely honest with you bro, I think having psychic powers is just as likely as whatever empathy thing you’re talking about.”

“It’s...well, it’s complicated. But it’s mirror neurons, like kids have so they can learn how to interpret social situations and act like normal humans. But mine didn’t go away. They just changed, I guess, into something a little different.”

“Um. Would you call either of us normal humans? No offense, bro, but were you totally normal as a kid and then became a weird adult because the mirror neurons didn’t go away?”

“Not…exactly.”

“Yeah, me either. I mean, I might seem outgoing and stuff, but people only tolerate me in small doses. I’ve always been weird. So the super mirror neurons aren’t a great explanation for me.” He chuckled. “I think we’re just psychic. But it’s fine if you disagree. I won’t argue.”

“No, that’s not…” he sighed. Maybe he would explain in more detail later, when he had some literature handy. “Nevermind. Do you really believe in stuff like that? Psychics?”

“Obviously,” Galen smirked. “And ghosts. And aliens. Did you miss the story where I was in a secret tunnel into the secret alien base? And I really think I saw a werewolf one time, and then there was this fairy circle--”

Will coughed. “Okay, okay. Maybe that stuff was real where you came from, but I don’t think it is here.”

“Except you’re psychic, so some of it is real.”

“Unless it’s empathy. Explainable by science.”

“I appreciate what you’re saying, I really do,” Galen said with a grimace. “But you can’t really think psychology is purely science. I’m not dissing it,” he held up his hands as if fending off criticism. “It’s important, and helps a lot of people. *But,*” He fluttered his hands as if looking for his next words. “It’s more art than science. Tell me I’m wrong.”

“You’re not wrong,” Will said, drooping. He’d held on to the empathy theory, the long-lived mirror neurons theory, for years. Galen was right, though. Nobody really knew for sure.

“Biology is wild. I can’t hold it against anybody that no one knows how to untangle everything that happens or malfunctions in a living body.” He huffed. “Like auto-immune encephalitis. I can understand viral or bacterial, outside invaders coming in and screwing everything up. But what the hell, immune system? Leave your own body alone! Bodies are so dumb sometimes.”

Will laughed softly, his sleepiness really starting to take hold. His new guest was odd, but he kind of liked him.

As he drifted off, he heard Galen softly singing *Hey Jude* by The Beatles, almost like a lullaby.

Chapter End Notes

Disclosure: I borrowed the cave with the staircases and elevator from some youtube cave explorations. Search "elevator cave" if you're curious.

Home Again

Chapter Summary

Will returns home after weeks in the hospital, to continue his recovery. He and Galen take steps to protect themselves from the Chesapeake Ripper, only to discover that things aren't as expected.

After weeks of recovery in the hospital, weeks during which Will refused to accept any visitor except Galen, he was finally home.

“Thank you,” Will said, “for the…” he gestured towards the recently repaired fireplace. Before he could say anything else, the dogs blocked his progress by surrounding him completely. He dropped to the floor to greet them, accepting kisses and liberally distributing ear scratches.

“No prob,” Galen said, shrugging off his coat. “It’s been cold and I like fire? Also, I’m good at rocks.” He flashed a wide smile at his counterpart.

Will huffed, though he was still smiling at his canine pals. “Yeah. Probably for the best that you were the one to do the repair,” he admitted. “I’ll stick to the boat motors and fishing flies.” He pulled himself back to his feet with some difficulty, still weak from his hospitalization, then crossed the room and put the white paper bag full of medications on the table next to his bed. Finally, he peeled off his hat and gloves and shrugged off his own jacket.

“Oh please,” Galen said, patting the head of the nearest dog. “As if you aren’t good at everything you try. But speaking of fishing flies,” Galen said. “You’ll want to double-check, but I didn’t find any flies in your stuff that matched the descriptions in the letter. So, um, maybe your murdery friend hasn’t planted them yet. Or maybe that’s not supposed to happen in this universe?”

Will relaxed a bit. “That’s…that’s good. And you—”

“Installed cameras already, yep.” He gestured around the room. “Hollowed-out dictionary, that lamp base, the tissue box,” he gestured towards the back of the house, “a decorative tea kettle, and a cookie tin. Don’t worry, I didn’t ruin your stuff carving out compartments and cutting holes.” He grinned. “It’s all thrifted. Except the cookie tin. I ate the cookies. You did pay for it all, of course.”

“Everything I own is thrifted anyway,” Will said diplomatically, falling onto his bed with relief. “One thing our upbringings had in common, I guess.”

“Everything should be boring enough that he won’t pick any of it up,” Galen said, plopping into an armchair.

“If he comes at all.”

“Yup,” Galen agreed, cheerfully.

“How are you so much happier than I ever am?” Will grumbled, leaning back and throwing his arm over his eyes. Zoe jumped onto the bed and climbed onto his belly.

“Honestly?” Galen asked. Will nodded. “Anti-depressants. I've taken them for ages. You may have heard of them,” he teased. “Since I didn’t find any prescription bottles around, I’m guessing you aren’t taking any for some reason.”

“Huh,” Will said. “That’s…interesting. Wait, did you have some in your pockets when you were dropped here?”

“Nah, man,” Galen denied. “I went to a clinic and got a prescription.”

“You don’t legally exist, though,” Will said, confusion obvious.

“Doesn’t matter,” he said. “Don’t need an ID to see a doctor or get anti-depressants filled. Not like they’re pain killers or anything.” He leaned further back in his chair, stretching his legs out.

“Oh,” Will said, voice uncertain. “Sometimes I, uh, empathize with happy people and feel happy for a while,” he admitted. “I always worried medications would interfere with my work.”

“I’m glad you empathize with happy people sometimes,” Galen said, carefully. “I can’t say for sure whether or not they would interfere with your work, but dude, the risk is worth it. Your therapist never suggested it? Isn’t he a psychiatrist? With, you know, prescription writing powers?”

“No, and yes.” On his belly, Zoe snuffled and Will lowered on hand to her back, resting it there gently.

“And he never suggested you try an anti-depressant.”

“…no. He’s not my doctor. We’re just having conversations.”

“Right.” Galen was unimpressed. “You know your GP can prescribe them too?” At Will’s silence, he sighed. “Probably for the best, not asking your therapist for anything. He might have given you something to make you hallucinate *more*. You should probably get a new therapist.”

Will sounded defeated. “It should probably bother me that the only psychiatrist I’ve ever been able to tolerate is probably a serial killer.”

“Is that why you like him, you think?” Galen wondered. “His, uh, darkness vibes with yours?”

“Probably,” Will admitted. “He has a dark sense of humor. He doesn’t make me feel guilty that I’m not a good person. He accepts everything I say as if it’s no big deal, and he doesn’t interrogate me about how my crime scene reconstructions work.”

“Sounds ideal,” Galen admitted. “Except, you are a good person.”

Will made a sound indicating his disagreement.

“I think I’m a pretty good person,” Galen said. “And you are me. I’m not mom—I don’t think feds are inherently bad people—so, in conclusion, me as a fed is not a bad person.”

Will snickered. “This entire situation is ridiculous.”

Galen smiled, relaxed and happy that Will was home. “I can agree with that,” he said. “I never even suspected I would ever find myself in an alternate universe, rooming with another version of myself. But I’m glad I got here in time to help you.”

“Me too,” Will admitted, voice soft.

—

Galen wasn’t sure what had woken him until it happened again: a wet doggy nose nudging his hand where it hung over the side of the bed.

“Doggy?” Galen asked, groggily. “Not time for food.”

Whichever dog it was—he couldn’t see it in the dark—it whined. Something was wrong.

He grabbed his phone from the trunk he’d dragged over to serve as a night stand and activated the screen, pointed down towards the floor. He could hear something downstairs. Presumably it wasn’t Will acting normally, because if that was the case, the dog—Max, he realized—would be downstairs with his favorite human, hovering in the vicinity of the treat jar with hopeful puppy eyes deployed at full blast.

Yeah. He knew their tricks.

He crept down the stairs in bare feet, slowly at first. When he heard Will make a distressed sound, a sort of whimper, his heart beat sped up instantly. In his mind’s eye, two possibilities came immediately to mind: Will being murdered by his therapist, or having a nightmare, possibly of being murdered by his therapist.

He carefully picked up the crow bar from where he’d stashed it behind the hand rail, wrapping it tightly in one fist.

When he made it to the ground floor and cautiously peeked around the wall, Will seemed to be alone. No sign of a therapist in the vicinity. To be certain they were alone, he did a quick check of the rest of the downstairs and the doors and windows to make sure everything was

secure. The new alarm system hadn't gone off, but who knew how well they stood up against notorious serial killers.

Feeling calmer after checking the area, Galen returned to Will, watching him for a moment as he twitched and grimaced.

Galen frowned and walked to the side of the bed, sliding the crow bar underneath the bed. Will had thrown off his covers, but Galen picked them up and laid them over the man again. Will had warned him that he had bad, sweaty nightmares, but aside from his underarms, he didn't look too sweaty to Galen. He wondered if that was specific to the feverish encephalitis nightmares. Or possibly, Max had woken him before the sweating got too bad.

Anyway, it wasn't important.

He climbed onto the bed and underneath the covers. Soon, his arms were wrapped around his sorta-brother.

"Shh, it's okay, it's just me," Galen said when Will began struggling in his hold. "Just a nightmare."

"Fuh--wha?" Will mumbled, reluctantly ending his fight.

"You were having a nightmare," Galen said, soft voice loud in the quiet of the night. "You're okay."

"...kay," Will accepted, shivering. He squirmed out of Galen's hold, then out of his t-shirt which was then tossed to the floor. One of the small dogs immediately sniffed at it before picking it up with their teeth and dragging it into their cozy doggy bed. He thought it might be the one called Buster.

Once Will had settled, he laid down with his back to Galen, shoulders tense, as if nervous. Was he expecting Galen to interrogate him about what the nightmare was about? As if. Instead, the younger man took the turned back as an invitation and wrapped Will in his arms, taking his place as the big spoon.

They were both silent for a few moments. "Isn't this kinda weird?" Will finally mumbled, voice gravel rough.

"What?" Galen said. "Cuddling with yourself? Yeah, it's weird." He laughed silently, distinguishable only by the shaking of his chest and the puffs of air against Will's bare shoulder. "Doesn't mean it's not nice," he continued, squeezing Will more tightly.

"Mm," Will mumbled, non-committal. But after a few moments, he seemed to have reached a conclusion. "Yeah, okay," he said on a sigh. "It's kinda nice."

Galen relaxed and laid his head on the pillow behind Will's, his nose and mouth pressed close to Will's neck.

He needed to buy Will some better aftershave. Maybe after he found a job, if that was even possible without an identity.

That was his last thought before he drifted off to sleep, Will following shortly after. There were no more nightmares that night.

—

Galen watched with interest through the window as a UPS delivery driver climbed out of his truck, fetched a package, and approached the porch. He opened the door before the man could even knock, smiled charmingly, and said "Hell-o." He raked his eyes down the brown-suited form and back up where he met amused eyes.

"Will Graham?" the man asked.

"Uh huh," Galen agreed before accepting the package. "Thank you."

"Have a good one," the UPS man said before trotting down the stairs in his cute brown shorts, tanned calf muscles flexing as he half-jogged. Those poor delivery drivers were always in such a hurry.

"You too!" he called and the man gave a little wave before jumping up into the truck and going on his way.

He finally closed the door and turned, meeting Will's eyes. He hadn't even noticed that the other man had been standing between him and the dogs, forbidding them from swarming the delivery man and/or escaping into the yard for playtime. Will was smirking.

"Got a thing for UPS guys, huh?"

"Who doesn't?" Galen asked, raising a brow. "Those little uniforms, their *legs*, the way you can see their legs even while they're driving because they don't close their doors? They're always in such nice shape," he continued. "All that jumping up into the truck and carrying heavy packages, I suppose."

"Mm," Will acknowledged. "Never really thought of myself as gay."

"Not gay, bro," Galen corrected. "Equal opportunity. You can't tell me you've never thought about it, babe. I'm from only one universe away. We can't be that different."

Will rolled his eyes. "Yeah, okay, whatever. It was just easier to ignore when I was growing up."

"Ah," Galen said, nodding, "especially *where* you were growing up, yeah? The south in the 80s and 90s, oof, I get you. I hid it too when we were in, uh, less accepting locales. But it's okay here, right? I mean, there were articles about Pride celebrations in some old magazines at the health clinic."

Will grimaced. "It's not like it used to be," he agreed. "But it's not the path of least resistance."

"That path is boring," Galen said with a shrug.

—

“So. Your murdery friend,” Galen started.

“Doctor Lecter,” Will agreed. “Allegedly.”

“That’s the one. We gonna report him?”

Will exhaled in a rush. “I…guess?”

“You don’t want to,” Galen observed, no judgment in his expression.

“I need to,” Will countered. “But is he even the same here? We didn’t find any evidence planted like the letter warned about. I don’t want to send the full might of the FBI after someone with the misfortune of sharing an identity with serial killers of other universes.”

“The Chesapeake Ripper exists here, though,” Galen pointed out logically. “Who is he if not the guy who was the Ripper in all the other universes magic watch guy visited?”

“That’s…yeah,” Will slumped in defeat. “The copycat exists here, too. I *really* don’t want to go down for that.”

Galen nodded emphatically. “Me neither. False imprisonment is one of my worst nightmares,” he admitted. “I’ve heard way too many stories of wrongful convictions. But seriously dude, we’re too pretty for prison.”

Will choked on his saliva. When he had his coughing under control and caught his breath, he looked at Galen. Galen looked a little bit amused, but underneath it all was true worry and distress. He carefully took a deep breath, then slowly exhaled. “We’ll report him. *Of course* we’ll report him. He’s wealthy, though, and he’s Jack’s friend. I’m not sure how hard they’ll look. They might, I don’t know, just ask him to voluntarily hand over half a dozen suits to comb for evidence and call it good.”

“I have an idea,” Galen said, smile fierce. “Give me fifteen minutes on your laptop. You have a VPN, right?”

“Obviously,” he said, rolling his eyes. That was a mistake. His head felt wrong, and looking too far up made him dizzy. He scrunched his eyes shut for a few moments, and cursed himself for forgetting that he was still recovering from a serious condition.

—

“Alana,” Will greeted the woman as she paused at the foot of the steps to pet the dogs who had opted to stay around the house with him instead of taking a walk around the area.

“Hello Will,” she said with a smile. “How are you feeling?”

“Better than I was,” he admitted. “Not back to normal, but getting there.”

“You’re still on leave,” she stated. “Jack said.”

“Yeah, he’s not happy about it,” he said, crossing his arms over his blue flannel shirt. One of his favorites, because he’d washed it so many times that it had become very soft. “Had to get HR to tell him to back off. I’m on medical leave for another three weeks.”

Alana nodded. “Good for you, Will. I’m happy you’re taking care of yourself.” She paused. “They brought in Jensen, the guy who retired from your position, to teach your classes. I think your students are trying to get used to his style of teaching. Less interesting, but with more interaction.”

Will laughed with some cynicism. “Who knows,” he said. “Maybe I’ll turn over a new leaf and let them talk to me when I come back. I’ve gotten used to listening, lately.”

“Are you referring to the, um, mysterious brother Jack has been ranting about?”

“Galen, yeah. He’s very talkative. *Very.*” He shook his head and stepped back a pace. “Sorry, Alana, do you want to come in? Have some coffee or something?”

She hesitated, but nodded her assent. “Thank you.” She let silence hang in the air for a moment as she followed Will through the door and to the table in the kitchen. She took a seat as he poured them each a cup. “You didn’t know you had a brother?”

“No idea,” Will said. “He grew up with our mom.” He placed the cups on the table then moved the sugar dish from the counter to the table. “Milk?” he asked.

“No thank you,” she said. “Wow. How did he find you?”

“Almost by accident,” Will said with a small smile, taking a seat across from Alana. “A third party introduced us, but there’s really no mistaking it. You’ll see when he gets back.”

“So he’s moved in with you. I wouldn’t think you would be willing to give up your privacy.”

“It’s worth it,” Will insisted. “Getting to know him has been nice, and it’s not like I don’t have the space. He’s been helping me through recovery, and he’s *very* insistent that I take care of myself.”

“Sounds like someone I would get along with,” Alana said, taking a sip.

“You’ll find out pretty soon,” Will said, smiling into his cup. He could hear Galen and the dogs approach. The dogs because they were excited and Galen because he was singing something, some kind of pop song he vaguely recalled from the radio a long time ago.

He stopped singing before he let himself in. Will heard the rustling of dog feet being cleaned and Galen removing Will’s coat. They needed to get Galen some more of his own clothes. It just hadn’t been a priority, since Will’s build hadn’t changed significantly between his twenties and thirties.

He and Alana were quiet as they waited, but they didn’t have to wait long. Finally, Galen entered the kitchen and Alana gasped.

She looked from Galen to Will. “You weren’t kidding,” she said. “There’s no doubt he’s your brother.”

Galen raised his hands, as if in victory. “Not Jack!” he cheered, before getting himself under control and brushing his hands on his shirt front. “Hello,” he said to Alana, his big charming grin on full display. He held out his hand. “I’m Galen. And you are?”

“It’s nice to meet you Galen,” Alana said, smirking at his display. “I’m Alana Bloom. Definitely not Jack. He giving you trouble?”

“Oh hey,” Galen said. “Will mentioned you. And yeah, man, Jack hates me. Dunno why, really. All I did was refuse to let him show Will pictures of dead people, like, right after he got admitted to the hospital.”

“Might have been the part where you had him escorted out by security and loudly asked the nurses to put him on the banned list,” Will pointed out.

“Pfft. He deserved it,” Galen said, waving his hand in dismissal. “Who does that? Try to show dead people pictures to someone who’s sick?”

“His methods are occasionally questionable,” Alana admitted, sipping her coffee. “He… sometimes can’t see past how highly he values Will’s input,” she concluded, diplomatically.

Will scoffed. “Valued is not what I feel when I’m working for Jack.” Galen began making himself a cup of creamy, sweet coffee and Will took a sip of his own. “I’ll be back soon enough, though,” he said. “He’ll just have to get through a few cases without my input. It’s not like he doesn’t have a great team. I’m not a…*magic bullet*.”

“This has been good for him,” Alana admitted. “Not having access to you. I think he believed after the Hobbs case he had you permanently on call, and that you were the key to solving every case.”

“I assume he’s solved some cases with his own team these past weeks,” Will said. “I haven’t kept up with the news.”

Alana nodded. “I’m glad you went into the hospital when you did,” she said. “The visit to the string shop might have gone really badly if they hadn’t sent Agent Flint in your place.”

Will perked up, interested. “Oh? What happened?” Agent Flint was an ex-Marine sharp shooter trained in hand-to-hand combat. Will *was not.*

“The suspect, Budge,” she pursed her lips. “He immediately attacked Flint and the two officers accompanying him. It could have gone very badly for anyone without Flint’s experience,” she said.

“Glad I wasn’t there,” Will agreed, easily. “So was he the guy, then?”

“He was,” she confirmed. “He’s being held without bail. Created a bit of trouble for Hannibal, though.”

“Oh?” Galen said, eyes sparkling. “How’d he do that?”

“He’s claiming that Hannibal is some kind of monster,” she shook her head in disbelief. “As if he is some kind of bogeyman who will snatch you into the shadows and devour you. It’s absolutely insane, to be honest. It certainly contributed to his placement in BSHCI instead of the general population.”

“That’s…bizarre,” Will said.

Galen looked thoughtful.

“Speaking of Hannibal,” Alana continued. “I think you’ll be hearing from him soon about picking back up with your appointments now that you’re out of the hospital.” She smiled indulgently. “I think he kind of misses your ‘conversations,’” she admitted. “I didn’t tell you this, but he *might* have had his feelings hurt a little bit when you refused to allow him to visit.”

“That was—” Will started.

“Don’t worry,” Alana continued. “When he found out that everybody was banned, he no longer took offense.”

“Oh,” Will said, not sure how to react. “Thanks for letting me know.”

“I’m glad to have met you,” she directed towards Galen. “It had us all worried that a mysterious, previously unknown brother was the only person allowed access to Will in the hospital,” she said, “but if nothing else, it’s obvious that you’re not an impostor pretending to be Will’s relative.”

“Gee, thanks,” Galen said with some humor. “Do you even have a will and life insurance policy, big brother?” he asked Will. “I mean, that’s normally what an *impostor* would be after, right?”

“The FBI pays for some life insurance,” Will said. “My assets are all willed to the dog rescue these guys will go to if I die.” He nodded at the dozing dogs around the space. “This property will make a nice animal sanctuary, I think,” he said.

“That’s so nice,” Galen said with a soft smile. “See?” he directed at Alana. “No advantage-taking.”

“I didn’t mean any offense,” Alana said, brushing her hair behind her ear with some awkwardness.

Galen chuckled. “No worries. I can understand that from your perspective it seemed sketchy.”

Will cleared his throat. “I’ll expect a call from Doctor Lecter, then. Or maybe I’ll give him a call.”

Alana gave him a sweet smile. “Thanks, Will.”

—

The next day…

From Tattlecrime:

DID A BITTER EX-PATIENT SWAT HANNIBAL LECTER?
By Tom Malloy

Yesterday, a full Baltimore city SWAT team was seen raiding the stately home of well-respected psychiatrist Hannibal Lecter. An inside source tells this reporter that the police department received a tip that Lecter was running a large-scale drug manufacturing operation out of his basement.

“It’s our job to take claims like that seriously,” an anonymous source told me.

As we all know, the War on Drugs has many victims. Some of those victims are the innocent people whose addresses have been submitted as locations of drug dealing or drug manufacturing. Such tips can be submitted anonymously or by unreliable informants with no consequences. *(Story continues after the advertisement)*

—

In the end, the SWAT team found nothing actionable. Hannibal Lecter did have a basement with a hidden entrance in his pantry, yes, and what was down there was weird as hell.

But not criminal.

That was all any of them would say. It was weird as hell, but they couldn’t find anything illegal.

“What the fuck. Now what?” Galen wondered.

“Time to go to the source,” Will said.

—

“Hello Will,” Hannibal greeted as he opened his office door. “Please, come in.”

“Hello Doctor Lecter. Thank you.”

Good Enough to Eat

Chapter Summary

Will entered the luxurious office space, feeling keenly the scant distance between himself and the Doctor as the latter held the door for him. After many conversations with Galen about what drew Will to Hannibal, he couldn't help the intense awareness he now felt in the other's proximity.

Briefly noting that their usual chairs were pulled quite close together, he detoured to the perimeter of the room, gently tossing his jacket onto a sofa before examining the many interesting books and objects displayed throughout.

"I had begun to despair of ever seeing you again," Hannibal said then, breaking the silence. His tone was more teasing than despairing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Hello Will," Hannibal greeted as he opened his office door. "Please, come in."

"Hello Doctor Lecter. Thank you."

Will entered the luxurious office space, feeling keenly the scant distance between himself and the Doctor as the latter held the door for him. After many conversations with Galen about what drew Will to Hannibal, he couldn't help the intense awareness he now felt in the other's proximity.

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"I had begun to despair of ever seeing you again," Hannibal said then, breaking the silence. His tone was more teasing than despairing.

"Sorry you were turned away at the hospital," Will offered. "Everybody was." His hands were casually tucked into the pockets of his new pinstriped trousers, his shoulders deliberately relaxed. He didn't feel nearly as confident as he had earlier, when he described what little plan he had to Galen, but he was a good enough liar.

"Not everybody was turned away, I heard," Hannibal said. He didn't sound angry, though. More curious.

“No,” Will admitted. “Not everybody.” He pushed the envelope a little bit by sliding one of the books off of a shelf, watching Hannibal from the corner of his eye to see if his rudeness had any effect on the man. Hannibal seemed as calm as ever.

“Tell me about your brother,” he said smoothly.

“What have you heard from Jack and Alana?” Will deflected, opening the book and gently shuffling through the pages. A book about occult psychology, it seemed. He supposed Hannibal must have patients will all kinds of issues.

Once Will slid the book back onto the shelf and moved on, Hannibal stalked him from a distance. Will felt delightfully hunted. The possibility that Hannibal was a serial killer gave this interaction an unexpected thrill.

“Very different accounts,” Hannibal said. “I would enjoy hearing yours.” Will glanced over at the other man and saw a small smile on his lips, the bunched muscles around his eyes suggesting that it was a genuine one.

“He’s very similar to me,” Will said, eyes roaming Hannibal’s form, “similar in many ways. In others, he’s entirely his own person.” Will leaned back against the ladder to the upper level, one of their earliest encounters flashing through his mind. Had he felt this pull even then?

The simple answer was yes.

He wondered what Hannibal was hiding underneath his suits.

“Is he also involved in law enforcement, I wonder?” Hannibal’s teasing tone suggested that he already knew the answer.

“Not at all,” Will said with an easy chuckle. “Nothing to do with law enforcement or psychology.” He let the silence at the end of his statement hang, becoming more relaxed as Hannibal failed to show even subtle hostility towards him despite his rudeness. The letter had described rudeness as Hannibal’s greatest provocation to murder.

“Interesting,” Hannibal said eventually. Does he happen to share your gift?” His eyes seemed to glint red in the low light of his desk lamp.

“My curse?” Will paused, but Hannibal’s expression did not change. “If he does, he doesn’t use it. No need, really, when you’re dealing with dirt and rocks instead of people.”

“No need,” Hannibal agreed. “Had you known about his existence?” he asked rather than follow up on the comment about dirt and rocks. Unsaid was the fact that Will had never told Hannibal about anybody in his family beyond his father, of whom he shared very little. Will spent his adulthood attempting to be as much of an island as possible.

“I had no idea of his existence until he was dropped off in Wolf Trap by a third party,” Will admitted truthfully. He hadn’t, in fact, known that there were alternative versions of himself

in alternate universes until a third version of himself had changed everything. “He didn’t have a choice either, really. The guy just dropped him and disappeared.”

“How peculiar,” Hannibal commented. “Who was the third party, if you don’t mind the inquiry?”

“He didn’t mention his name when he popped in,” Will said. *He’d written it in the letter.* “Anyway, it’s not important. I’m not upset about it. Galen has been great.” He finally redirected his wandering and crossed to his customary chair, where he slowly lowered himself onto the seat and watched as Hannibal did the same.

“Galen is your brother’s name, I presume.” Hannibal really was unfairly attractive. It wasn’t even so much his face, though it was beautiful in its way. It was more about the way he moved and spoke, and the subtlety of his expressions and body language. Will wasn’t overwhelmed by picking up every feeling Hannibal experienced while they spoke. It made their interactions less tense than Will was accustomed to feeling in the presence of other people.

“Yep, that’s him,” Will confirmed.

“Alana mentioned that your resemblance is very significant,” he said neutrally.

Will nodded. “To say the least. I’ll put it this way: if we were the same age, we would be twins.” *Identical twins, in fact.*

Hannibal’s eyebrow twitched. “Fascinating. And will he continue to live with you?”

“That’s the plan,” Will said. “You seem very interested in my brother,” he added. Will wondered how Hannibal might work Galen into his plan to frame Will for murder, if that was even a thing that was happening.

“It is not often that I can compel you to speak about your personal life at such length,” Hannibal pointed out. His face reflected good humor and prompted a smile from Will.

“Fair enough.” Will unbuttoned the cuffs of his *’sexy blue shirt’* (Galen’s words) and rolled them up his forearms. Was it getting hot in there? The sight of flickering fire light on the side of Hannibal’s face contributed to the feeling, he was sure.

“I wonder,” Hannibal said, “if the both of you might be interested in being guests at my table. I would love to have you for dinner.” His smile was both inviting and anticipatory. The *predatory* nature of it may or may not have been his imagination.

Will almost choked. If Hannibal Lecter was indeed a man-eater, he sure was a cheeky fucker. “I’ll check with Galen,” he responded with as much composure as he could muster. “I think he might be on a vegetarian kick though. Would that be a problem?” If Hannibal did plan to feed them long pig, Will wouldn’t make that choice for Galen. His younger self could claim bouts of vegetarianism as often as he’d like to avoid potential cannibalism, if that was his choice.

“Not a problem at all,” Hannibal said with a pleased smile, leaning back in his chair like a sated cat.

“Jack won’t be there, will he?” he checked. “Sorry, but we’re not on the best terms at the moment and I’d prefer to avoid him until I have to return to work.” Funny that he would rather spend time with a maybe-murderer instead of someone who, like him, had chosen to spend his career working towards the apprehension of criminals.

“I thought to invite only yourself and your brother,” Hannibal assured. “Perhaps Alana and Abigail if you wouldn’t mind.”

“Shit,” Will whispered. He’d almost completely forgotten about Abigail, so occupied by his own recovery and the massive changes Galen had brought to his life. “Is Abigail doing okay?”

In truth, the obsessive concern he had felt for her had largely dissipated with the treatment of his encephalitis. And since every mention of her during his time in the hospital had been met with Galen’s quizzical expression and raised eyebrow *(”You said she’s nineteen and in treatment bro, worry about yourself for now”)*, he’d stopped bringing her up even before his odd fixation had faded.

“There is nothing alarming I feel the need to convey regarding Abigail,” Hannibal said, “but you may ask her yourself when the time comes.”

What’s that supposed to mean? Will thought. Out loud, nodding agreeably, he said, “Alana and Abigail won’t attempt to pull me into any investigations, and I’m sure it’ll be nice to see them both.”

“Splendid,” Hannibal said with a wide smile. His teeth looked sharp.

—

Earlier that day…

“Bro. I’ve seen your bank account. You could afford an outfit that isn’t *Professor* or *Lumberjack*.”

Will shook his head in denial. “I don’t need new clothes.” Hannibal had seen him him literally in his underwear. What difference would clothes make on his appointment?

Galen smirked. “Your ass needs new clothes.”

Will closed his eyes. “My ass is fine.”

He realized too late what he’d said. Laughing in defeat, he face-palmed.

“Yes. Yes, it is.” When Will removed his hand from his face, Galen was smiling at him innocently.

Will rolled his eyes. “I thought it would be weird to pretend to have a brother, but this is exactly what I imagined a little brother being like, so.”

Galen pumped his fist.

“Why do you want me to dress up anyway? I’m just going to get a read on him now that my brain isn’t on fire, right? Aren’t we going to mostly keep our distance from him after this? Isn’t that what you do when someone might be a cannibalistic serial killer?” Just thinking about all of these questions made him exhausted. The drugs he was still taking to suppress his immune system might also be to blame, to be fair.

“Think about it, babe. The closer we stay to him, the less likely he’ll be to kill us. None of his friends go missing or die, do they? All the Ripper and Copycat victims are totally unconnected to him, right?”

“Fair enough,” Will sighed. “Why the clothes, though?”

“You want to get invited to dinner, don’t you?” Galen asked. “If you decide to take him down, food is the key. And if the invite extends to me and I get to ogle him in person instead of those society page photos, I won’t complain.” He licked his lips.

“You’re much more annoying than I am,” Will said. “He doesn’t like rude people, remember?”

“I can behave.” He tilted his head, a faux-earnest expression on his face.

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” he said, but he smiled. Will had always kind of wanted an annoying little brother to bicker with while he was growing up. “I hope you’re not planning on going anywhere, even if we get you papers,” he said wryly. “I like having you around.”

“Success!” Galen cried.

—

Present

“Honey, I’m home!” Galen called as he waltzed into the farmhouse. “I bring great treasure!”

“Not another TV, I hope,” Will said from the chair in front of the window, glaring at monstrosity where it was mounted over the fireplace. A second TV was in Galen’s room upstairs. Why they could possibly need more televisions, he had no idea, and he hoped the inundation would stop soon.

(They had already discussed *why* Galen wanted TV. *”But Will,”* he’d said. *”I’ve never had one before, and these ones are flat!”*)

Galen smiled in the face of Will’s grumpiness. “I literally brought honey. Did you know Esther,” he gestured with his head vaguely east as he kicked off his shoes, “keeps bees?!” He held out a canvas sack. When Will looked inside, he discovered half a dozen jars of golden

goo. Buster nosed his way past the bag, putting his paws on Will's knees, trying to earn some attention for himself.

"That's a lot of honey," Will said. He did like honey. "Will we use it all?"

Galen rolled his eyes, taking the bag back and leaving it on the piano bench before leaning back against the instrument. "You know very well, Mr. published-authority-in-entomology, that sealed honey lasts for-fucking-ever. You have any cook books? Like, with baking?" Galen's pink tongue poked out of his mouth, wetting his lips.

"Use the tablet, but so help me, if you get it all sticky…" Will trailed off when he realized he sounded like his pops. He closed the book he'd been reading, set it aside and picked up the insistent Buster. Buster tried to lick his face.

"Mm," Galen said, nodding enthusiastically. "Nobody's wanted to trade me a tablet yet. I'll be *so* careful."

Will sighed. "Don't worry about it. It's not really important…as long as you promise to clean it up." He smiled. "What'd you do for, um, Esther?"

"Repaired some shingles and fence boards, nothing major. And hey, I'm teaching Sheila how to build a cob house starting this weekend. You know, the one with all the acres? Purple house, big garden?"

Will was slightly taken aback. "You know how to build a house?"

"Hell no," Galen protested. "I mean, I could figure it out probably. I'm not bad at building shelters in the bush, how hard could a house be?" His ironic smile suggested that he wasn't quite serious. "But no, a cob house. With mud and straw, you know?"

"…like a hobbit hole?"

"Like a hobbit hole!" he agreed. "Or a storybook cottage, whatever she's in the mood for. I learned how years ago. She's *paying* me for this. With actual *money*." He grinned cheekily.

"You know you don't *have* to work, right?" Will asked, lips turned down. "You know what I have in the bank. I can support both of us and you can take your time figuring out what you want to do."

"I know, bro," Galen assured him. "I'm just keeping myself busy, yeah?"

"Yeah, okay," Will said. He allowed himself to smile. "Congrats on a paying gig. And I want to see the hobbit hole."

"Deal. So…" he said. "How'd it go with the Doctor?" He moved onto the piano bench next to the bag of honey, then leaned forward, elbows on knees. Time to get serious, apparently.

"It was okay, I guess," he said with some reluctance. "I didn't pick up any particularly sinister feelings that I hadn't before, despite the clear mind, so it was a bust in that sense. He did say, I quote, 'I would love to have you for dinner.'"

“Damn. Not subtle, is he?” Galen looked both concerned and amused.

“Apparently not,” Will agreed.

“My part of the plan worked, then,” Galen said. “You looked good enough to eat.” He ignored Will’s face as he pulled a jar of honey out of the bag next to him. “Think he’d like some local honey as a gift when you go?”

“You’re invited too,” Will said.

Galen’s mouth fell open. “My dream come true. I’ve always wanted to meet a serial killer. Just kidding,” he said when he saw Will’s incredulous expression. “That’s, uh, cool? I’ve never eaten humans before…” He was clearly reluctant.

“I told him you might be on a vegetarian kick and he said that’s fine. No guarantee he won’t sneak something in, but probably no actual meat.” He shrugged.

“Oh my…bless you, you beautiful man. I’m not sure about eating people.” His face scrunched at the thought. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, as a survival thing it’s fine, but humans eat *so much garbage* and have *so many diseases*.”

“Thanks for the reminder. Too late for me,” Will admitted glumly.

“Hey, no judgment,” Galen insisted, waving his hands. “You were just in the hospital and they fixed you all up, so unless cannibalism causes encephalitis, you probably haven’t suffered from the exposure?”

Will hugged Buster, who snuffled at his hair. “Maybe he isn’t a cannibal,” he said, grasping for optimism. “He doesn’t have a murder basement. He doesn’t read as a psychopath.”

Galen nodded seriously. “Guess we won’t know much more until we infiltrate his inner circle…of dinner party guests. Hey, that asshole won’t be there with his corpse photos, will he?”

“Jack?” Will asked. “No. Maybe Alana and Abigail.”

“Oh,” Galen said. “I guess that’s okay then.”

—

Galen’s to-do list the following day looked like this:

1. Bake some honey-rich goods, eat some, and feed some to Will.

2. Give excess delicious baked goods to favorite neighbors so they will hire me for future projects.

3. Create YouTube and Instagram accounts.

4. Start vicious, authentic-sounding rumors about Freddie Lounds on the internet.

5. Find out what Abigail Hobbs' deal is and why Will cares *(side note: is everybody a cannibal? Does Hannibal care about her because she is a cannibal? Is cannibal solidarity a thing?)*

6. Obtain Will's permission to bring some of his pups on the cob house job.

7. Obtain Sheila's permission to bring the pups on the cob house job and take photos and video of the project.

8. Obtain some cameras and/or discarded smart phones.

9. Become internet famous and fill Will's bank account with ad revenue so Will can quit working for the FBI if he wants to.

10. Keep being fabulous.

Chapter End Notes

Just want to assure you all that I am dedicated to writing (and finishing) this fic! Summer and TMJ headaches have caused some update gaps, but I anticipate that both things will pass. <3

An Introduction

Chapter Summary

> “I can assure everyone,” he said, “that neither Mr. Graham has undergone any facial plastic surgery of note.” He looked to Will as he delivered another piece of crystal stemware. “Their features are…naturally *identical*, it seems. How fascinating.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As Galen set up about half a dozen cameras and phones around the soon-to-be build site, he wondered if he should have practiced recording a smaller project first. Some sort of basic repair or build without so many variables influencing the success (or lack thereof) of the project.

And then he shrugged to himself and continued. Go big or go home, right?

He had pawned several televisions (everybody he worked for wanted to get rid of their old televisions; he wasn’t sure if people in his original universe upgraded their TVs so often, but they sure did here) and used the cash to purchase what he thought he might need for his new career as Internet Famous.

Turned out that here in the future, there were lots of digital cameras and cell phones people were getting rid of because, like their televisions, they thought they had to upgrade them every year or something. Many were available cheap or free. He bought large memory cards, external battery packs, tripods, and a few harnesses to complete his setup.

In the end, he believed it would be worth it. Even if the videos weren’t perfect, the antics of the dogs would, he hoped, bring in the viewers. Not to mention the fact that he had plans to become progressively less clothed as the day went on. He was in good shape after all of the hiking and exploring he’d done for years. Might as well use it to his advantage.

“Galen, love, are we ready to start?” Sheila asked excitedly as she strode towards the site of the future hobbit hole with a bucket full of ice and beverages. As requested, she wore very practical clothing: work pants with reinforced knees and some kind of synthetic t-shirt. At least three decades older than he was, she had a deliciously fantastical sense of humor and reminded him of one of his endearingly eccentric anthropology professors. Hanging out with her was a fun time, and he probably would have helped her build a cob house even without the pay.

The pay was appreciated, though. Not legally existing was a serious barrier to formal employment. He was super grateful that most people in the neighborhood were cool with

hiring an unlicensed handyman to do jobs for a quarter of what the professionals would charge. They also liked that he was open to working for trade.

The Internet Famous idea was a little more risky. He hoped to hell that no one decided to do a deep dive investigation into who he was (or *wasn't*). It could totally cramp his style. To get around his lack of legal existence, he was obviously registering everything related to finances to Will's name and bank account. And clearly, he wouldn't be revealing personal information to his future fans. With any luck, it'd be okay. Thank geode he could trust his bro-self! Everything would be a million times harder without him.

The spot they had selected for the cob house would soon become surrounded by flowers and veggies as Sheila's massive garden expanded. The roof would be covered in native grasses and flowers.

Sheila was going to love it.

He mentally tallied their supplies, which stood ready:

Straw
Sand
Clay-rich soil
Stones collected from the property
Rolls of birch bark
Reclaimed fixtures
Tools
Buckets
Water hose

Blinking himself back into reality, he finally answered Sheila's query. "Yes! We are ready," he assured her as he made sure the last of the cameras were running. "Day the first. Let's go!"

"Huzzah!" Sheila exclaimed.

This was going to be *awesome.*

--

When Galen returned home, he and the dogs were a total mess, but they'd all had a blast. Everything had gone to plan, and his next step would be editing his very first video together.

He had hosed the mud off of the dogs and himself before leaving Sheila's, allowing them all to dry in the sun on the walk back. Still, he made sure to towel the pups before letting them loose in the house.

He deposited the bag full of cameras and equipment on the table near the door before stripping off his own still-slightly-muddy clothes and heading to the laundry to throw them in for a wash. It wasn't something he would usually do around a roommate or family member, stripping down completely in the common area of a house. In this very unique situation, however, Galen easily shrugged off any nudity.

Will already knew what Galen looked like naked, after all, since he owned a mirror. Neither of them had anything to be ashamed of. They both had some scars, but Galen preferred to think of those as adding a bit of roguish charm.

Besides, they *both* knew they were hot, even if Will was less inclined to admit it. And letting your skin get some air was healthy. Nudity happened, and it was fine.

He had, of course, assumed that he and Will were alone in the house on this particular occasion.

When he exited the laundry room in the buff and walked towards the kitchen where he had noted the dogs heading after their toweling-off, he was surprised to find—a little too late—that the dogs weren't the only creatures Will was speaking to. He had company. Human company.

"Well *hello* there," a woman he hadn't met before said from a chair at the kitchen table, immediately noting his presence. She was very pretty, and if Galen hadn't been feeling extra gay lately, he probably would have had a problem having his dick out.

"Hello yourself," Galen said with his best charming grin, leaning casually against the door frame. No use freaking out. Might as well play it cool. "Who might you be?" *Had he really walked by someone's car without noticing, or had she been dropped off?* he wondered.

Will, who seemed to be wheezing in either laughter or anxiety and face-palming a bit, managed an introduction.

"Beverly," he said. "This...this is Galen. Galen, this is Bev. From work."

"Nice to meet you, Bev from work. You don't have any corpse pictures, do you?" Galen checked.

"Not with me, bud," Bev said. "This visit is entirely because I heard Will had a practically identical twin brother and I'm very nosy. And here you are."

"Here I am," Galen agreed, wondering if she was telling the truth. She read as sincere, at least, but he hadn't honed his empathetic abilities as finely as Will had. "And we are practically identical, yes," he said with a wink. "Excuse me for a few while I find some pants."

"Not on my account I hope!"

"Not at all," Galen said over his shoulder as he headed towards the stairs, noting that she was watching his ass. "It's a bit chilly, is all." He pretended to shiver.

He could faintly hear her saying to Will, tone distinctly humorous, "Just how identical are you?"

After that, he was far enough away to hear only indistinct murmuring in the kitchen followed by a burst of cackling laughter. Once he reached his room and closed the door, he finally

allowed his own repressed laughter to wheeze out of him as he grabbed a pair of sweats to pull on.

He still needed to shower, so he couldn't get fully dressed yet. He only wanted to preserve whatever modesty he had left.

Which, if he was being real, wasn't much. Hopefully his kinda-repressed sort-of-brother thought the situation was funny instead of humiliating or something. It was hard to say for sure given their differing upbringings and Will's relative lack of forced practice in interacting with other humans. He would hope for the best.

—

"So, that's your brother, huh?" Bev said with a coy smile.

Will snorted, then coughed, mostly amused but a little embarrassed. "That's Galen," he croaked. "In all his glory."

Bev cackled. "I'll say," she agreed. "Are you going to report me for sexual harassment for staring at your naked brother and forming some intriguing hypotheses?" she teased.

"You're here as a friend," Will said.

"A nosy friend," she confirmed, grinning without remorse.

"Not a coworker."

"Okay then," she acknowledged, smile widening. "So when you coming back, big boy?"

"Big boy" Will muttered under his breath, turning to face the coffee maker that had finished its gurgling and hissing. He grabbed three mugs from the cupboard and proceeded to pour a generous helping in each. "My medical leave is up in a few more weeks."

"Sweet. How's vacation been?"

"It's involved a lot of, uh, hospitalization? And medications that make me feel terrible. But overall I've enjoyed it more than work. So, there's that."

A startled laugh escaped her, and he realized that having people in his circle of acquaintances who laughed without malice or irony was nice. "When brain inflammation is more fun than your job...that's maybe when you should start rethinking your life choices."

She wasn't wrong, he thought as he handed her a mug. Between that and getting to know a much happier version of himself, he had questioned more than once lately why he did what he did. And then he remembered that doing what he did helped stop serial killers, and surely the mental stress was worth saving lives?

"How did you find out what was wrong with me?" Will asked.

“Guess,” she said, rolling her eyes. “That man is might as well be submitting the complaints about his behavior himself. It’s like he’s never read the handbook or taken a course on ethics.”

Will frowned. Openly telling people that he may have been mentally compromised for an unknown period of time seemed like an odd move if Jack actually wanted Will back on his team. Obviously it was a situation that already meant the cases he’d worked on would be under review by the higher-ups and that was bad enough. But it had already been well-established that there were leaks in the FBI, and he was uncertain why Jack would risk letting the media run with a story like that.

He sighed. A worry for another day. “Any interesting cases?”

“Is your brother gonna tackle me if I start telling you about them? I mean, I wouldn’t be opposed.” She winked.

Galen’s voice drifted through the doorway. “He’s *asking* about the corpses. It’s different!” He appeared a moment later, again pausing in the doorway and relaxing against the frame, crossing his arms. He was considerably more clothed than before. He accepted a mug from Will with a look of gratitude. “Will’s more than capable of making his own decisions. It just rubs me the wrong way when someone tries to force a guy suffering from a serious illness to look at dead people pictures because they can’t figure anything out without his magical mind powers. It’s rude. And lazy.”

Bev shrugged. “Fair enough. And, uh, mostly the usual?” She said, turning back to Will. “Fucked up psychos murdering and sometimes mutilating people. I think Jack is starting to remember that we’re able to close cases without you, at least. We might not be solving them as quickly as we were with your help, so we’re working on several cases at a time, but we’re managing.”

Tension Will hadn’t known was present drained out of his muscles. “Good. That’s good.”

“It’ll be nice to have you back, though. I mean, if you even want to come back to field work. It’s totally valid if you want to stick to teaching, and if Jack tries to give you some kind of ultimatum, remember that he’s not actually your boss.”

Will’s smile looked painful. “Being a Special Agent is what I always wanted to do.”

“Yeah, okay, but is that still true?” One eyebrow rose to emphasize her query.

Will had no answer.

—

“Um, wow. I feel like I should get dressed again,” Will said when Galen walked down the stairs.

The other man’s normally riotous hair had been somewhat tamed, the curls more defined. He wore a shirt that belonged on a pirate, beneath some kind of shiny vest, his legs wrapped in

close-fitting black trousers. Will immediately felt inadequate.

“None of that,” Galen said as he trotted down the stairs. “I mean, yeah, you are going to get dressed again, but you aren’t allowed to feel bad about it.”

Will’s eyes strayed to a shopping tote in Galen’s hand.

Noting the direction of that gaze, Galen explained. “I used part of my first payment from Sheila to get us some appropriate clothes. Don’t give me that look! They weren’t expensive. There’s a great little second-hand store the next town over. Please strip down, babe. We only have half an hour to make you even more mouthwatering than usual. If the doctors aren’t trying to gnaw on you before the night is over, I’ll be shocked.”

Will rolled his eyes, but stripped to his shorts and undershirt. He couldn’t stop himself from snickering at the mental image of Hannibal and Alana desperately chewing on his limbs.

It didn’t take long for him to be re-clothed *more appropriately for dinner with rich people*. He had to admit that he looked better, even if he wasn’t entirely sure of the large houndstooth pattern on the light gray suit, something more out of Hannibal’s playbook than anything he would have thought to wear himself.

“It’s newish,” Galen offered, “but the cut is very 1960s. We have the build for it.”

Will could only agree. It didn’t look bad. Not at all. And the blue t-shirt he wore in place of a collared shirt and tie made him feel a lot more comfortable than any other time he’d had to wear a suit.

As Will continued to examine himself in the mirror, the other man pulled out a tiny bottle from his pocket and sprayed it at Will without warning.

He managed to mostly suppress an instinctive flinch, turning it into only a brief flex of his muscles before again relaxing. “That why you told me not to use aftershave?”

“There are many reasons I told you not to use aftershave,” Galen said with a scoff, though he was grinning. “But yes. It’s Tom Ford. This stuff is expensive as hell, but it smells incredible.” At Will’s look he continued, “Obviously this is a free sample. If you want a real bottle of it you’ll have to either pay with your hard-earned money or make doe eyes at the Doctor until he wants to shower you with gifts.”

Will rolled his eyes. “I don’t need a sugar daddy.”

“Don’t knock it till you’ve tried it,” Galen said, eyes shining in glee.

—

The ride over was relatively quiet until Galen asked, “Do we have a strategy for tonight, or is this just dinner?”

“Your strategy is to be polite,” Will said.

“And yours?”

“To be polite. As polite as I get, anyway. And to not empty my stomach at the thought that I might be eating people.”

“Life goals,” Galen said agreeably. He paused a moment. Then, “I can’t not be myself.”

Will sighed, suddenly feeling like an asshole. “I’m sorry. That’s not what I meant. Be yourself, just...I don’t know. Be careful.” He swallowed. “You’ll be fine. You read people like I do. He’s hard to read, but you’ll be able to see when his *mask* is fitting too tight.”

Galen shrugged with faux nonchalance. “It’ll work out. I’ll try not to, like, insult his cooking or decor, yeah?”

Will chuckled. “You haven’t even insulted *my* cooking or decor.”

“True,” Galen agreed. “I mean, I did grow up in a hippie bus, and cooked food was kinda basic since we didn’t have a real stove or much money. College life wasn’t much better. So living with you has been kind of a luxury, actually.”

“...that makes sense, I guess.” He wondered if Galen’s life on the road had been better or worse than the series of run-down rentals he and his father had lived in. Bus living seemed to involve a lot of travel to interesting places on the plus side, but an almost total lack of stability and comfort. Stability was something he valued highly.

And, even if he had a bit of a drinking habit, his pops had always been a loving and supportive parent. Galen’s stories about their mom made it sound like she’d raised Galen only because abandoning him hadn’t been an option upon the death of her husband. It sounded like they’d lived in close quarters physically, sharing a bus as they did, but if Galen’s lack of much distress over never seeing her again suggested anything, it was a certain degree of emotional distance.

They’d need to take a road trip at some point, he decided, so he could introduce Galen to their papa. They would be able to trust the man with the truth.

—

“Good evening,” a dark figure silhouetted by tasteful lighting greeted them at the door, his voice warm. “Please, come in.”

Hannibal stepped back into the hallway to wave them inside, finally illuminating his sharp features and a gracious smile.

“Thank you,” Will said. Galen offered a small smile but stayed quiet. He’d met a lot of different people throughout his life, but had never been in such a grand house that hadn’t been converted into a museum. For a moment, he felt like a character in some Regency-era novel, visiting a town home after a lengthy stay in the country, newly in the city to visit the shops and take in some opera.

“How was your journey?” Hannibal asked as he helped Will out of his coat. *You don’t have to pay a fortune to look good, bro,* Galen had informed him. *Why buy some goddamned ridiculous designer pea coat when you can get a real one at the military surplus?*

“Good,” Will said as Hannibal hung the coat. “Less infuriating than usual,” he corrected himself.

Hannibal turned back to Will and paused to take him in. His eyes seemed to glow in the dim lighting as he looked the other man over, clearly appreciative.

“I’m glad,” Hannibal said.

Galen decided right then that Hannibal Lecter *wanted* to be Will Graham’s sugar daddy if the looks he was throwing at his kinda-brother were any indication.

Galen shrugged out of his coat on his own, accepting Hannibal’s slightly distracted offer to hang it next to Will’s. The psychiatrist’s curiosity was almost palpable. He eyed Galen like he was a puzzle, or maybe a previously missing piece of a puzzle he’d been trying to put together for some time.

Will broke a slightly awkward silence descending on the three of them, perhaps remembering that the other two had not met. “Ah,” he said. “Dr. Lecter, this is Galen. Galen, Dr. Hannibal Lecter.”

“Please, I would enjoy it if you would call me Hannibal,” the man said to both of them as he shook Galen’s hand.

Hannibal’s skin was unusually hot against Galen’s palm. “Sure thing,” he said. “Outside of professional settings, formality is for strangers, enemies, and people you wish you’d never been introduced to, yes?”

“Precisely,” Hannibal responded, a bit of amusement showing through.

Galen retrieved a canvas bag he had placed on the floor before doffing his coat. “We brought you some local honey,” he said, handing the bag over. “Our neighbor keeps bees. Thought you might enjoy cooking with it.”

“Very thoughtful,” Hannibal said, looking between both Graham men. “Local honey is a precious commodity and always appreciated. I do wish my home was more conducive to keeping an apiary.”

Galen bit his lip instead of making an inappropriate comment. The closest he’d ever gotten to someone as in-your-face-wealthy as Hannibal was when he’d agreed to drive a friend to a voice lesson with a retired opera singer and been invited to wait. He’d accepted, since the place was half an hour from their apartment and as soon as he’d made it home he would have had to turn around. He might have opted to wander outside, despite the very real risk that the cops would be called on his scruffy ass, if he’d known accepting the invitation would mean an hour of sitting on a white couch in a white room staring at a white canvas hung prominently on the wall as if it was actually art. Beyond the obvious absurdity of the entire

situation, he'd been paranoid that he would stain the furniture simply by sitting on it. Were the pants he was wearing the clean pair or the ones he'd worn crawling around in a cave last weekend? He couldn't remember and was too nervous to stand up and check the status of the upholstery. He had never been so glad to be asked to remove his shoes upon entering a place, given the state of his boots and the whiteness of the floor.

A white cat made itself known eventually and climbed into his lap, calming his anxious mind. He had another mental freak-out a few minutes later when he discovered that the poor baby had been declawed, but it was too late to save its little toes. He focused on giving the cat the strokes and scratches it required and managed to make it through the otherwise unnerving experience.

He mostly avoided people who flaunted their wealth, real or imagined.

"Do you have a cat?" Galen asked Hannibal. A guy could hope for a bit of furry comfort in uncomfortable places.

"I am afraid not," Hannibal answered, expression curious. "At present, the only creatures I keep are snails and goats."

Snails weren't cuddly at all. Who kept *snails* of all things?! Wait, goats? "Um. Just wondering," he said, confused. "You seemed like you might be a cat person. And I like cats. They tend to avoid Will's house. Could I meet your goats? I like goats."

He was rambling a little. This was fine. The place wasn't white at all, and he knew his clothes were squeaky clean, even if the house was devoid of a conveniently calming feline presence.

"Perhaps later," Hannibal acknowledged.

Just go with it, he told himself as the maybe-cannibal ushered them into the dining room where Alana and an average sort of girl were already seated.

While Will greeted them with a reserved smile and a few words on his way to a chair, Galen headed to the ladies' side of the table. "Alana, fabulous as always!" he exclaimed, air kissing either side of her face. "How lovely to see you again!" She appeared to be too surprised to respond.

"And this enchanting creature must be Abigail!" he continued, grabbing the younger woman's hand and bowing over it dramatically. "Charmed, I'm sure!" Her reaction was a pair of raised eyebrows and wide eyes.

If his feeble rich person imitation didn't break the awkward tension that he'd felt upon entering the room, he might have to resort to other measures.

That, it turned out, was unnecessary. As he took his own seat, both women were laughing, Will was smirking with one eyebrow raised, and Hannibal was looking between Galen the the ladies with bemusement. A success, then.

“I’m Galen,” he directed at Abigail where she sat across the table. “Will’s long-lost brother, or possibly an impostor with an excellent plastic surgeon, here to convince Will to make me his beneficiary before I arrange for his early demise. Who knows which.” He shrugged.

Hannibal, placing a glass of wine on the surface in front of Galen, examined his features.

“I can assure everyone,” he said, “that neither Mr. Graham has undergone any facial plastic surgery of note.” He looked to Will as he delivered another piece of crystal stemware. “Their features are…naturally *identical*, it seems. How fascinating.”

Galen nodded as Hannibal, expression faintly perplexed, set the wine to the side and paused behind the chair at the head of the table. “Yes, we were trying to keep it a secret, but we’re actually identical twins. I was just caught in an experimental stasis chamber for several years. Halted my aging. Very inconvenient.”

Will, who had taken a sip, choked a little bit. Galen thought it was probably because Hannibal was making a face that communicated something along the lines of *’sounds plausible.’*

Will cleared his throat and adopted a mien of faux-outrage. “You told me you were my clone created in a secret government program in case I need an organ transplant. You *lied*?” he accused, hand over his heart.

“Okay, okay,” Galen said. “The *real truth* is that I’m Will Graham, a traveler through time and dimensions, and when I arrived I discovered this world already had a Will Graham, so I had to choose a new name and pretend to be my own brother.” He smiled big while Will stomped on his foot under the table.

“You two are ridiculous,” Alana said, shaking her head but smiling with a hint of fondness.

“It seems your imagination may rival your brother’s, Galen,” Hannibal observed, clearly amused. “Please excuse me while I retrieve the first course.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who read and left kudos and comments while I was away. They truly mean a lot to me. The unexpected loss of one of my cats in early September had the effect of first eliminating my desire to write, then ensuring I couldn't even when I wanted to because my other two cats need to be in my lap anytime I'm not standing--they're grieving too, poor beebs. But anyway, hello. It's stormy outside and my cats are napping on pillows instead of my person, so hopefully the next update will be a bit quicker. Love to you all!

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